The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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THE Rev. J. C. Street acknowledges, with thanks, the receipt of the following contributions in aid of the gratuitous printing and circulation of the *Chronicle and Index*:—Miss M'Mechan, Ballybranagh, 2/-; and Miss Jardine, Dromore, 2/6.

Further contributions will be gladly received.

The Autumn Sunday School Conference is to be held at Moneyrea. The precise time is not yet decided, and some details as to arrangements have to be made; but it is well our friends should know that most probably early in the month of October this Conference will be held. They will thus be able to regulate their arrangements with a view to being present on the occasion.

IT will be a great convenience if the collectors of the Unitarian Society would proceed at once with the collecting of the subscriptions for the current year. The Treasurer is in need of funds, and his duties will be discharged with more comfort and efficiency if the monies at his disposal are increased by the outstanding amounts due in subscriptions. No time should be lost in complying with this request of the Treasurer.

Mr. Sydney Hope Street, son of the Rev. J. C. Street, has passed the entrance examination for Carmarthen College, and will enter upon his studies for the ministry in that institution in the month of October.

The Rev. Robert Collyer, of New York, is on a visit to England, and is receiving a hearty welcome from his many admirers and friends. We should like to see him in Ireland, and especially in Belfast, but fear there is little chance that we shall be favoured with a visit. But he may feel assured that he is loved and honoured here as well as in England and the United States.

THE Annual Pic-Nic Excursion in connection with the Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association took place on Tuesday, July 27th. The day was very fine. The place selected was Crawfordsburn. A happy party set out from Belfast in a first-class saloon carriage, and alighted at Helen's Bay Station. Hence they wended their way down the lanes to the sea-shore, where they sauntered on till they crossed the burn, and entered the glen, where they passed an enjoyable time until tea, which was provided at the pretty hotel in the village. After tea, Mr. Charles, of the Vienna Photographic Co., got the whole party into a group and photographed them. Then there were games and dancing, followed by refreshments of fruit, &c., and then the party wended their way back to the Railway Station, and arrived in Belfast about 11 p.m. after a most enjoyable day.

THE children at Hopeton Street have been deprived of their country excursion this season, owing to the terrible and disgraceful riots which have gone on so long in the town. The parents were afraid of allowing their children to go away from home, and the teachers were averse to the responsibility of taking them. So the poor children are disappointed. In all probability the teachers and friends will find some way of softening this disappointment to the children. At all events we hope this may be the case.

THEODORE PARKER'S GRAVE.

A FUND is now being raised by the friends and admirers of Theodore Parker to improve the condition of his tomb, in the old Protestant Cemetery, Florence. It is proposed, among other things, to place over the grave a bronze bust or medallion of the great reformer. The nature and extent of the improvements that will be made will depend upon the amount of money that is collected. We notice, with pleasure, the names of the following among the first subscribers:—Miss Cobbe, Dr. Martineau, F. W. Newman, Miss Swanwick, Peter Dean, Miss Lyell, Miss Davenport Hill, Charles Voysey, &c.

The Rev. J. C. Street will be glad to take charge of any subscriptions sent to him, and will forward them at once to Boston, U.S.A.

THE Rev. D. Thompson, of Dromore, in writing to the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, as one of its Home Correspondents, says:—

The state of our churches is a matter deserving of serious consideration, because they represent enduring principles of inestimable value to the individual and to society, and which we desire to see operating in every department of life, in all our duties and concerns. Our congregations in the north of Ireland are only thirty-five in number, and, with one exception, are located in the counties of Antrim and Down. In point of numbers, we form one of the smallest of the religious bodies in this country; but the character of our people is such that they exercise no little influence in the community, and, as an evidence of popular confidence and respect, many of them are called upon to fill positions of trust and responsibility. In looking around for signs of progress in liberal religious thought, there is little to encourage us. Whatever broadening of views there may be privately, we see few outward indications of it. But apart from theological questions, it is most gratifying to note the increased earnestness of the various churches in matters of practical concern, in temperance, philanthropy, and social reform. We gladly hail every movement which tends to make religion more influential in life. Our churches stand for this quite as much as for the propagation of particular views. With regard to the state of our churches generally, I think I am justified in taking a more hopeful view than usual, not on account of increased numbers or outward accessions, but because of renewed vitality within our own ranks, and the manifestation of a desire for closer union and more earnest work. Every tendency in this direction should be encouraged, in order to combine and utilize our resources, and help the common cause. Belfast has long been regarded as the head-quarters of our faith. Our four congregations there, with their respective ministers, are ably sustaining the reputation of the past. The First Congregation is now in possession of a handsome and commodious building, called the Central Hall, which stands near the meeting-house, and will prove very serviceable for denominational and other objects. The two Unitarian Depositories are well supplied with all our publications, and the annual reports show that a good business has been done. Hopeton Street Mission School is carried on by the Second Congregation with unflagging zeal. At York Street, a church building scheme is in hand, and a sum of £500 is wanted to carry it out. To assist in raising the required amount, preparations are making for a sale of work some time in the autumn. At Larne, owing to the generosity of a member of the congregation, certain enlargements of the meeting-house will be made, for the accommodation of a new organ and the choir. At Cairncastle, steps are being taken to renovate and improve the meeting-house. In connection with Glenarm, a new Sunday School has been opened at Ranestown, with promise of success. Services have been resumed at Limavady, and it is hoped they will be continued. At Ballymena, matters have assumed a new aspect; and a committee of the Remonstrant Synod has been formed with a view to missionary work there. The missionary committee of the Non-subscribing Association arranged for the delivery of lectures in the Town Hall, Lurgan, and four lectures were given. The same committee has

organized lectures to be given in Warrenpoint and Glenarm. Hitherto our missionary efforts have not been attended with much success. It may be noted that several of our ministers have for years past conducted services from time to time in outlaying districts of their congregations, and with the happiest results, as at Downpatrick, Dunmurry, Newry, Larne, Dromore, Glenarm.

FROM "DREAM-GROTTO."

I watch the birds that hop about my feet
Across the lengthening shadows on the lawn,
And see them perch upon the slender twigs,
And lightly sway themselves from tree to tree,
Then soar into the peaceful blue of heaven,
And send to earth a perfect flood of song.

Oft will man envy these glad birds their wings,
Forgetting his soul's pinions, that can take
Him on from flower to flower and peak to peak,
And upward to that vast ethereal dome
Beyond where bird can reach or wind may blow,
And back and forth through all the centuries
(From ages past to ages yet to be)
Until, as free as lark in yon blue sky,
He soars in the pure azure of his thought,
And utters songs that lift the human world.

—*Gowan Lea.*

THE BUILDERS OF THE CHURCH.

A SERMON.*

Paul teaches that the Church of God is built upon a firm foundation—a foundation which human workers find already existing antecedent to their own labours—even Christ. And we naturally conclude that he intended to indicate that God Himself had performed this fundamental work. The edifice founded on this rock of the wise builder proves stable amidst the revolutions and storms of earth and time. Every earnest Christian, every true minister of Christ, builds upon this foundation,—builds what will endure, or what will, sooner or later, pass away. Each is a builder, and each is a living stone in this temple. The humblest stone must be fashioned, and to a great extent self-fashioned, in strength and beauty, qualities emblematical of truth and morality, and so contribute to the strength, proportion, and beauty of the whole. And some, like Paul himself, are builders in a larger sense, not simply adapting and shaping and sculpturing themselves, but with a builder's skill and power laying many stones in this divine structure. For here, as elsewhere, men are not alike in virtue, nor equal in endowment. Their work differs in kind, in extent, in value, or at least we men estimate it variously. Paul was a wise master-builder, a distinction which he attributes to the grace of God which was given unto him. God allots to us our powers and our opportunities; to some more, to some less; to each according to his ability, and of that he is judge. It was through this gracious gift that Paul, in a secondary sense, had laid the foundation of the Church at Corinth, and another was building on that foundation. An Apollos, gifted with eloquence and persuasiveness, was, in Paul's absence, watering what he had planted, and building on the foundation he had laid. But the earnest missionary rises above envy or jealousy, and recognises a co-worker. Possibly there was a shade of distrust, but that is only human; as, indeed, we have an element of human pride in Paul's objection to build on another man's foundation. But they were working to one end. In this great field of work there was ample room for minds of differing calibre and quality,—for work of various kinds. And each labourer may be useful, each may—nay, must—use his peculiar powers in earnest effort to carry on the grand design. Nor need the labourers stop to estimate the worth of their own or others' doings. It is not for us to judge of *their value*. Attempts to do so would only betray our ignorance and waste our time. Some work, though valuable and necessary, is hidden from sight. A careless spectator might altogether fail to perceive or think of it. But it is not unheeded "in our great Taskmaster's eye."

Crowds of visitors are attracted yearly by the stately buildings of the city of Venice. From the silent canals they gaze up at the

* Preached before the Non-Subscribing Association at the annual meeting, June 22nd, 1886, by the Rev. T. Dunkerley, B.A., president.
1 Corinthians iii. 9—15.

lofty walls and turrets, sculptured and adorned with taste and skill, or within they admire decorated hall and corridor. And thus they do homage to the architects and builders of a far-off time, of some of whom the very names have perished. But they are apt to forget the other work that rendered those erections possible: they are apt to forget the foundations laid with masterly skill and unmeasured labour to bear those noble superstructures of marble and stone. Our illustration points also another lesson. When the founders of the city, flying from the dreaded Huns, sought to rear a home in the lagoons, they could not found it on the solid rock, but on the insecure sand. Yet human skill can overcome for a time this natural defect. But it may be for a time only. It may be that in future years the waves and sands of the Adriatic will swallow up those stately palaces, because they are not founded on a rock. Paul does well, then, to inculcate the importance of the foundation.

The foundation of the Christian Church is no creed nor theological system, nor is it any fixed code of laws and regulations. Christians possess no infallible oracle whose utterance will solve each moral problem that may arise. Such a system, if it relieved perplexity, would destroy all spiritual life. The foundation is Christ himself, not his words only, but his life which gave power to his words. And the motive, the essence, the principle of his life, that which the men of old called the "blood" of his life, was *love*. To be founded on Christ, then, is no other than to be based on love. This is the distinguishing mark of his Church. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples." Jesus himself used the metaphor of a kingdom. And the kingdom which he came to establish differed from other kingdoms in this, that while they are based on ambition and maintained by force, this kingdom is based on love; one "new commandment" embraces its legal code. Love is its only law; brotherhood its only citizenship; and fatherhood its only sovereignty. The builders of the Church must build on love.

But the apostle is not only solicitous about the foundation, but also about what is built thereon. "Let every man take heed," he says, speaking first of his own work and afterwards of the "great foundation," "Let every man take heed *how* he buildeth thereon," *i.e.*, with what materials he builds. And he indicates *two* kinds of materials, one kind that is *perishable*—wood, hay, stubble; and another kind that is *enduring*—gold, silver, valuable stones; matters of doctrine nearly or only distantly allied to truth; philanthropic efforts to help others, springing directly from the everlasting foundation of love, or tendencies shaped by the exigencies of the time, and carrying with them the marks of transiency, if not of error.

The foundation is broad and firm, and will admit of many superstructures, varying widely in character. Some may be the humble erections needed for a passing sojourn, even for the brief lodging of a night, for which wood, hay, stubble, easily gathered and readily put together, may serve. But it is only what is enduring that is worthy to be built on this noble foundation; only what is permanent can find a fit place in the sublime temple of God.

In its aspect as an earthly organization, the Church has to do with perishable materials—with wood, hay, stubble; with things of the present which, their end fulfilled, are doomed to pass away. "The Church of God," of which Paul wrote, was no circumscribed community, but simply indicated the collective body of Christians. But in their eagerness for strength or power, humanly considered, men have departed from the true spiritual foundation. To some minds the very idea of a Church involves a priesthood, an ecclesiastical organization, or an infallible book. And lofty structures have been reared with these materials. They have been buttressed with authority, invested with superstitious terrors, and defended with physical force here, and threats of endless suffering hereafter. One might have thought that these ugly and repulsive features would have put the student of Christ upon his guard, for they are altogether out of harmony with the foundation of love. There have been ages in which the so-called Christian Church has appeared denuded of the distinctive signs which the apostle or Christ set forth; when ambition, selfish

and domineering ambition, has seemed to be its actuating principle; and when, intoxicated by earthly power, she has wielded arms and armies; when, to gain her ends, she has waded through fire and blood, through deception and violence, and has even employed the poison-bowl and the assassin's dagger. No wonder that men failed to discern through the lurid flames of war and the dark vapours of diplomatic craft, the Church of God, the kingdom which is peace, and love, and righteousness.

But these things, though heaped up with zeal, and built with care, are but transitory. Those who reared them have neither built on the true foundation nor used materials which will endure. Forces exist that will undermine and destroy those proud structures, as in older times they levelled the idolatries, and the immoralities, and the inhumanities of the old heathen world. The fire of reform enkindled by these forces, will wither and consume the "wood, hay, and stubble."

Yet even reform has too often stopped short of the fundamental rock. Instead of Christ, men have set forth

> "But a dim shadow, that recasts
> The creed of the Phantasiasts,
> For whom no man of sorrows died,
> For whom the tragedy divine
> Was but a symbol and a sign
> And Christ a phantom crucified."

Instead of Christ men have set forth a theology or a creed. They have forged fetters for the human soul, which have cramped and crippled it, instead of leaving it free to soar Godward. And so cruel orthodoxy, with its unhallowed fruits, odium and persecution, has usurped the place of gentle Christianity, with its fruits of holy love and divine self-sacrifice. But that was not a Church, but a prison; and while we shudder at its horrors we may rejoice that it was built, not on the everlasting rock, but on the crumbling sand.

It is evident, however, that the apostle speaks not of anti-Christian doctrines, nor of the products of selfish ambition, but of teachings sincerely meant, and thought to be essential to Christianity, but which were attributable to the imagination of their author or to the ignorance of his age. The teacher mistakes the vagaries of his own mind, or the subtle influence of the *zeit-geist* for the leading of the spirit of truth. It is an error into which the human teacher is ever prone to fall, but an error which, though it may be productive of mischief in the Church, does not imperil the teacher, for his sincerity redeems him. "He himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Like the prophets of old, the Christian minister's danger does not arise from the proclamation of what he believes to be true, even though it be erroneous, but from withholding, from some alloy of earthly fear or hope, what in his heart of hearts seems true. Above all, God asks of us honesty. Though others may frown, though the world may scoff or threaten, yea, though the utterance may seem to lead to results he deprecates, the Christian minister must be true to his own self, if he would preserve his own peace of mind, a peace beyond price, or if he would do true work in the holy cause. Coleridge spoke truly when he said, "It is more honourable to the head, as well as to the heart, to be misled by our eagerness in the pursuit of truth, than to be saved from blundering by the contempt of it."

Let us then go boldly forward into the realms of truth. Free and earnest inquiry, reverent speculation, do more to advance religion than the haunting dread of touching forbidden ground. Unshackled by subscription, and possessing the faith of glad children to whom no room in our Father's house is closed, we may press forward with joy. No discovery can do other than proclaim our Father's goodness and love. He who goes forth to explore and becomes entangled in intricate forests need not despair. It is only an additional revelation of the wealth of our Father's universe, and gives assurance of the abundance which will minister to the needs of his children. Follow then the leading of the spirit, with the confidence of those who love and are loved.

Still the apostle's warning is felt to be seasonable to those of us who seek to be builders in the Church of God, who desire by the labour of teaching to develop and enlarge that Church. "Let a man take heed with what materials he

builds." To work without avail, to be a mere cypher, is intolerable to an earnest soul. In our prisons the most grievous punishment consists in turning a crank which simply numbers the revolutions it makes. Every man desires that his work may be of use, that it may be of enduring character. But how is that work to be tested? The apostle in our text alludes to a test by which the perishable materials may be distinguished from the enduring.

That which each builder has done will not remain hidden; for "the day" will make it known, because the day is revealed in fire.

What is "the day," and what is "the fire," to which Paul refers?

"The day" is the Parousia, the second coming of Christ; and "the fire" is that in which he was expected to appear. And here Paul himself affords us an illustration of his own teaching, an example of the perishable material which he sought to build into the structure.

In the early Church there was a belief in the speedy re-appearance of Christ on earth. Lingering round "the elements of the law," the early Jewish Christians failed to lay aside at once the material images in which prophet and psalmist had clothed the day of the Lord. They felt it hard to think that Christ had finally left them. They looked for his coming as one might look for the return of a lost friend. Yea, they looked that the mighty change wrought in themselves should spread over the world. And Paul, sharing the thought, expected the Parousia in the life-time of his hearers. But as the years rolled on he seems to have attained another and higher truth, that "to depart and be with Christ was far better."

But as all error works ill in some shape or other, so, it may be, we can trace evil effects from this conception. It withdrew men's thoughts from the ordinary duties of life, and led the Corinthian Christians to put "gifts," *charismata*, in the place of moral duties, and to prefer the less spiritual to the more spiritual—an effect which Paul had the acumen to perceive and to decry. Paul himself, then, as well as the Corinthian Church, are illustrations of the evil caused by working unsuitable materials into the fabric of the Christian Church. And this example shews us likewise, that although the test of which he spoke proved a dream, yet there is indeed a test which will distinguish the perishable from the immortal, a test which loosened the hold on this belief in Paul's own mind, and has removed it, or nearly so, from the Church of modern times. This is the test of time and experience.

The foundation is immortal, and the materials that can fitly be built upon it must partake of an imperishable nature. What are the things which cannot be affected by time? Such spiritual and immortal things as truth, morality, faith, hope, charity; not particular dogmas, but undying principles; not speculations, but eternal verities; not conventional practices, but duty, benevolence, self-sacrifice.

Finally, let us glance at some of the lessons for ourselves that this passage gives.

First, Paul would have us take heed that we build upon the foundation, even Christ.

Let us interpret this in no narrow sense. The narrow-minded man is apt to picture a narrow being, and having defined and limited this being in accordance with his own contracted spirit, he exclaims, "This is my Christ!" But the foundation is laid by God, and not by that puny soul. The true Christ is our soul's ideal of the highest human perfection. And he whose mind has been expanded by knowledge, and his heart opened by heavenly grace, must have a Christ wider than his utmost thought, purer than his noblest ideal, holier than his loftiest aspirations—nothing less, indeed, than the

> 'Strong Son of God, Immortal Love!'

and must feel that even this falls short of the Christ whom God has laid to be the foundation of his Church.

(2) Next, let us take heed what we seek to build on this divinely-laid foundation. Nothing partial in its nature should find place here, nothing temporary or transitory, nothing narrow or exclusive, or it will not harmonise with the foundation. With Jesus let us set forth God as the universal Father, who loves all his human children; and with Jesus let us teach

that love is acceptable service to him, love which goes forth to his earthly children, our brethren. To win men to righteousness and all goodness, to build them into God's Church, demands determined consecration and vehement resolve on our part, that nothing may cause to waver. Are we free from the attacks of outward foes, from carking cares or engrossing anxieties? let that call us to more free-hearted and grateful service. In the past our fathers wrought, like Nehemiah's builders, with trowel in one hand and sword in the other, and in spite of their troubles performed noble work. Let our more peaceful times stir us to strenuous and joyous efforts. Thus building, with our eye single, our heart devoted, the Church will rise in true beauty, and our work be approved with the stamp of permanence.

(3) In toiling on this edifice we may think our work vain. It must be so if conceived in a selfish or narrow spirit. It may be so even if we are sincere and earnest; for we may build only "wood, hay, stubble;" but, in that case, even then our good aim will be our salvation. It cannot be so if, while keenly alive to the greatness of the work, we are obedient to the inspiration and leading of the spirit of holiness. Every true thought, every holy word, every noble deed, springing from a heart of love, contains the stamp of heaven's approval. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name."

We are not able to estimate correctly its worth; we may have to hand it on unfinished to another, as we ourselves received the fruit of their toils from those who went before us; but what of that? We must still work on. The soldier in battle, wrought up to an intensity of effort, knows not, amid the uproar and smoke, how the day is going. The hodman on the wondrous cathedral, fails to note how his humble labour is contributing to the grand result. It is not for us, humble toilers, to question the fitness of the few details within our limited ken. Rather it becomes us to trust in the Divine Architect, who knows the end from the beginning, and can overrule even our errors to his almighty purposes. It is sufficient for us to know that sincere endeavour cannot lead us wrong, and that he will bless the poorest deed which runs parallel with his grand designs. The day shall declare it. God shall make manifest, in his own good time, the work done.

God judges not as man judges; and Jesus represents himself as saying to some who have his name familiarly on their lips, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity;" while to others who have not been conscious of serving him, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Many whom the world has despised, many whom the Church has branded as heretics, many who were thought to be altogether in error, or altogether in ignorance of Christ, will be recognised as fellow-workers. "Well done, good and faithful servants!"

We may take encouragement from the sight of what has already been accomplished. Measure the ground gained. The battle is not going against us. Measure the height attained,—the building is certainly progressing. The result of the efforts of an individual may be small, and scarcely discernible. But look at the work of centuries. See what has been accomplished in 1800 years, and our hearts may rejoice. Old idolatries overthrown; slavery a doomed institution; human life elevated; society purified; and the home sanctified.

Of the first Jewish temple it is told, "There was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building." Tyrians were hewing in Lebanon, woodcutters were busy on Carmel, eastern hunters and miners were gathering furs and gold in Ophir. And as the result, in Jerusalem,

> "No workman steel, no ponderous axes rung,
> Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung."

So mightiest movements go on silently. In peaceful ages the Church grows almost imperceptibly. The very builders may not be aware of it. They may sigh for the times when the bustle and stir was great; they may cry, "O for the conflict and the victory of that heroic age." And all the while, unconsciously to themselves, the spiritual forces are making noble headway. But the end is not yet. The

glorious consummation is still far-off, and we have need to whisper patience to our eager hearts.

Slowly moves the march of ages,
Slowly grows the forest king,
Slowly to perfection cometh
Every great and glorious thing.

But the foundation has been laid. "The blood of the martyrs, which is the seed of the Church," has been shed. And the superstructure rises above the surface amid storms of persecution, lightning shafts of rage, and blighting airs of indifference and contempt. Pillar and tower and column have been slowly reared, while the builders have shed tears of joy. Not yet, however, can we adequately appreciate the height and beauty, for the scaffolding confuses our view. But it continues to rise, and those who come after us will see

How gleam thy watch-fires through the night,
With never fainting ray!
How rise thy towers, serene and bright,
To meet the dawning day!

It will rise until its pinnacles pierce the heavens, and the Church on earth shall be one with the Church above. And we shall join in the psalm of old: "Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness."

THE rest of Christ is not that of torpor, but harmony: it is not refusing the struggle, but conquering in it; not resting from duty, but finding rest in duty.—*F. W. Robertson.*,

No man ever sailed over exactly the same route that another sailed over before him. Every man who starts on the ocean of life arches his sails to an untried breeze.—*William Matthews.*

THE warm sunshine and the gentle zephyr may melt the glacier which has bid defiance to the howling tempest; so the voice of kindness will touch the heart, which no severity could subdue.—*Herder.*

THE BELFAST UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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